



Humpback Whale Trapped off New Jersey Draws Rescuers (Update1)

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By Chris Dolmetsch

Feb. 26 (Bloomberg) -- Rescuers are working off the New Jersey coast to try to save a humpback whale trapped in fishing nets, the **U.S. Coast Guard** said.

The **whale** is caught in netting about 8 miles (13 kilometers) off **Sandy Hook**, a peninsula at the northern end of the New Jersey coast about 20 miles from Manhattan's southern tip, the U.S. Coast Guard said in a **statement**.

The Coast Guard has set up a 500-yard safety zone around the animal and stationed the cutter Penobscot Bay to protect the humpback from ships. A three-person team of rescuers from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric **Administration's fisheries service** and the Provincetown **Center for Coastal Studies** in Massachusetts arrived today to free the whale, which is visible on the surface and breathing.

Officials don't know how old the whale is or how healthy it is, although it appears to be a young humpback about 30 feet long, said **Teri Frady**, a spokeswoman for the NOAA fisheries service. A recreational fisherman spotted the animal about 9 a.m. yesterday, she said.

"You can't have the thing be anchored for long because then it can't feed," Frady said in a telephone interview from Massachusetts. "And it's not going to last too long if it can't eat. We need to get it freed so it at least is mobile."

Humpbacks Are Endangered

About 11,500 humpbacks are in the western North Atlantic, including a group of some 850 in the Gulf of Maine that the trapped whale probably came from, Frady said. Six whales died after becoming entangled from 2002 to 2006, she said.

Humpback whales are classified as an endangered species by the U.S., according to the **Marine Mammal Commission**. The animals can live 50 years or more and grow to as heavy as 90,000 pounds (40,800 kilograms) and 56 feet long.

The humpback population was decimated by commercial operations in the early 1900s that killed more than 28,000 of the animals in the northern Pacific Ocean alone and forced a ban on taking the whales, **according to the commission**. Today, they are threatened by collisions with ships, entanglement with fishing gear and disturbance by whale watchers.

The **International Union for the Conservation of Nature** said in August that **humpback whales** are no longer threatened with extinction as the species recovers, with a population of more than 60,000 worldwide.

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